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SUBJECT: THE CHANGING NATURE OF TRAFFICKING IN
MOLDOVA: ANTI-TIP ACTIVISTS DESCRIBE SUBTLER,
HARD-TO-PROSECUTE TRAFFICKING METHODS

Sensitive But Unclassified. Please Protect
Accordingly.

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Two of Moldova's most
experienced anti-TIP activists met Ambassador
Chaudhry on December 19. They described subtle
but profound changes in the methods used to
recruit and trap victims of trafficking, and the
challenges that these "kinder, gentler" methods
posed to police and prosecutors. They also gave
high marks to the Government of Moldova (GOM) for
its actions in assisting the return and
rehabilitation of victims. End summary.

Strategy and Tactics of the Best in Moldova

¶2. (SBU) Ana Revenco, founder and Director of La
Strada Moldova, heads an organization devoted to
the protection and promotion of women's rights,
and advises the GOM and other governments on
legislative and law enforcement tools used to
combat trafficking. Stella Rotaru, who was
featured in the May 5, 2008, "New Yorker" article,
"The Countertraffickers," has the modest title of
Repatriation Specialist at the International
Organization for Migration (IOM). Her actual
rescue and repatriation work takes her to
destination countries, where she negotiates with
high-level prison, law-enforcement and Moldovan
embassy officials to effect the release of
victims.

Gentler Methods and the Illusion of Freedom

¶3. (SBU) Revenco and Rotaru described the most
common profile of female victims in the last few
years: single young females from rural areas,
poorly educated and often mentally slow. (They
also noted an increase in males trafficked for
labor.) Both noted that over 90 percent of female
victims came from families where wives and
children were beaten. Victims, they said, were
increasingly recruited by friends and even family
members. Despite widespread knowledge of the
dangers, they accepted high-risk jobs (nightclub
dancers, even providers of sexual services) as a
temporary necessity. Most were transported
legally across Moldova's borders, with valid
passports and visas (if needed) to the usual
destination countries of Turkey, Russia, UAE,

Israel and Cyprus. Revenco and Rotaru affirmed that crimes associated with trafficking almost always took place outside the borders of Moldova.

14. (SBU) According to Revenco, new trafficking methods co-opted victims, made evidence of crime harder to collect, and therefore rendered prosecution more difficult. She stated that female victims believed they could exercise choice, were not victims, and were often treated better as sex workers in foreign night clubs than they were at home. Rotaru described the psychological manipulation used since 2005 or so as profoundly different from the "classic" modus operandi of trafficking, which involved deception, imprisonment, and frequent beatings. The more recent method offered what Revenco called the "illusion of choice." Victims abroad, she said, were told that they were free to return to Moldova, except for the matter of debt to the trafficker, which must be worked off in a brothel; victims were told that they could pay off the debt (typically 6,000 Euros) in several months, and then would be free to stay on and earn their own money. Describing initiation rituals, Revenco said that women were placed in a dormitory room with experienced prostitutes, who made light of the work, and offered drugs and alcohol to "make things easier."

15. (SBU) According to Rotaru, if the victim continued to disagree, she was threatened with arrest by police in the foreign country who, the

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trafficker claimed, were friends of the traffickers, and would jail the women indefinitely. If she cooperated, Rotaru noted, the victim was allowed to keep a small portion of what she earned (typically USD 300 per month) and to call home; if she recruited a friend or relative, she would be allowed to return to Moldova. Under such circumstances, Rotaru and Revenco both noted, the amount of evidence available for arrest and prosecution was reduced. In fact, according to Revenco, the victims, who were almost always the principal sources of evidence, were reluctant to bring complaints at all, because they had been manipulated into an illusion that they had exercised choice. Rotaru further noted that in many countries, victims could not legally be treated as victims of trafficking, and thus made eligible for IOM and GOM assistance, until they specifically identified themselves as such. According to Rotaru, in comparison to the battered lives many of them lived in bleak, jobless villages at home in Moldova, the victims stated that they were better off in brothels in a foreign country than in hopeless Moldova.

Praise for GOM Efforts, Concern about Transparency

16. (SBU) IOM's Rotaru lauded GOM efforts in assisting the 140 victims abroad, so far this year, who requested assistance: Moldovan embassy consular sections granted no-hassle passports, and the Ministry of Internal Affairs provided protection to returnees at Chisinau Airport. Escorts from the Ministry of Social Protection traveled to Russia and Ukraine in IOM vehicles to accompany returnees from those countries. The GOM provided 400,000 lei (USD 40,000) for rehabilitation in 2008, and has budgeted 500,000 lei for rehabilitation, and a new line-item of

600,000 lei for repatriation, in 2009. The National Referral System (NRS), which began as a pilot project in six raions, now covers 19 out of Moldova's 32 raions. Rotaru added that NRS services to potential victims, including counseling and job training, were good. Equally important to prevention efforts, she said, was training to the Border Guards, who have used their new knowledge to interdict several suspect emigration attempts.

¶7. (SBU) La Strada's Revenco noted that the National Committee for the Prevention of Trafficking in Persons did invite NGOs to their meetings, and consulted NGO members about laws and regulations but only at the initial stages. She said that U.S. pressure had been successful in focusing GOM attention on the problem. She also expressed hopes that the U.S. would apply pressure on the GOM to increase long-term NGO participation in the regulatory scene. Revenco believed that more NGO participation was required in the international arena, to assist countries in regulating migration, providing fair labor standards and contracts for labor migrants in destination countries, and establishing police-to-police contacts.

¶8. (SBU) Revenco, Rotaru and the Ambassador all agreed that Moldova had limited resources, which must be targeted more effectively. Thanking the Ambassador for his active support in curbing the menace of trafficking, Revenco and Rotaru concluded that trafficking in Moldova was no worse than in other countries in the region, and that the situation had clearly improved in the last few years. They noted that prevention efforts were crucial, given the need to stop exploitation before it could occur, and given the difficulties of juridically tackling what Revenco and Rotaru called the new, "fluid, underground, invisible" system that lured victims into an illusion of choice outside Moldova's borders.

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Comment

¶9. (SBU) Both Revenco and Rotaru confirmed what Post has been hearing from GOM and other NGO contacts about the changing nature of trafficking: the actual crimes (sequestration, passport seizure, beating, for example) taking place outside of Moldova; the shift to friends and relatives as traffickers; and the consequent difficulty faced by Moldovan law enforcement officials in finding evidence that can be used successfully in court. Under these circumstances, victims become victims only when they are outside of Moldova, and individual traffickers (as opposed to large networks) can operate more easily under the radar of law enforcement. We therefore expect that trafficking will appear in much lesser amounts in Moldovan criminal statistics, and that fewer prosecutions and convictions for trafficking per se will result.

¶10. (SBU) Given these tectonic shifts in trafficking methods, restricting our USG interest to arrests and convictions for trafficking cases per se will not give the complete picture. Widening the category to include the "Al Capone" factor of trafficking arrests under other categories (such as illegal migration) will give a better picture of GOM efforts to stem both

potential trafficking and the means for
trafficking.

CHAUDHRY